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Constructing Zoroastrian Identity in Muslim Iran

In the article I would like to pay attention to the internal diversity of so-called Muslim world. In my research I deal with the Zoroastrian religious minority in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Although contemporary Iran is a confessional state and its official religion is Twelver Shi'ism, the religious pluralism is present in the country. I would like to comment on the process of constructing Zoroastrian collective identity in the context of Islamic state.

Key words: Zoroastrianism, Islam, identity, Iran, dhimmi, Islamic Revolution, Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt

Zoroastrians in Iran

Zoroastrianism is an ancient Iranian religion founded by Zoroaster, the inspirer of the reforms applied to ancient Iranian beliefs. One of the major unsolved problems in the history of Zoroastrianism is the location of the prophet in space and time:

> "While there is general agreement that he did not live in western Iran, attempts to locate him in specific regions of eastern Iran, including Central Asia, remain tentative. Also uncertain are his dates. Plausible arguments place him anywhere from the 13th century BCE to just before the rise of the Achaemenid empire under Cyrus II the Great in the mid-6th century BCE, with the majority of scholars seeming to favor dates around 1000 BCE (Malandra 2005)."

In the course of time Zoroastrianism spread among Iranians and became the dominant religion in the country for centuries. It was the official religion of the Sassanid empire (224–651), the last Iranian state before the Arabic conquest. The triumph of Islam in the Middle East brought the religious, sociopolitical and economic changes and became a turning point in the history of Zoroastrianism:

> "between the seventh and thirteen centuries, Iranian culture underwent a series of political, religious, and social changes that displaced Zoroastrians from the apex of society and elevated Muslims in their place. Certain events and actions helped Muslims – of Arab, Iranian, or mixed descent – rise to rank of elites while simultaneously working against Zoroastrians who then became subalterns through colonization, assimilation, and alienation (Choksy 1997: 10–11)."

After the Arabic conquest, Zoroastrian population was marginalized and its members were treated as a group of an inferior social status. Many of them was exterminated or forced to conversion and many others left their homeland, mostly for India, where they live today known as the Parsis. As Khanbaghi reports, after the spread of Islam, the situation of Zoroastrians became worse than of other religious minorities and

> "the major handicap of Zoroastrians under the Arab dynasties was their link to Iranian national identity. They had dominated Iran numerically and politically for more than a thousand of years. The Muslim Arabs who had had to fight them for the domination of the Iranian Plateau, considered them dangerous rivals. In the early days of their rule, the Arabs accepted Zoroastrian administrators and viziers of Zoroastrian background in their government, but after the uprisings in Iran, the only non-Muslims they relied in belonged to the Jewish or Christian faith (2006: 33)."

As *dhimmis*, protected people according to Islamic categorization, Zoroastrians in Iran had to pay tax called *jizya*. The oppressive tax was abolished in the second half of the nineteenth century thanks to help brought by their fellow believers from Bombay. In Bombay the Society for the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Zoroastrians in Persia was established and the Parsis sent their agent, the merchant Manekji Limji Hataria[1], to Iran:

> "Manekji set himself promptly and tirelessly to improve the lot of the small Zoroastrian community, shrunk in numbers, as he sadly records, so as to be no more than a pebble in the great heap of Muslim wheat; a people in the main of scanty means and little or no education, of whom "hardly one or two in a hundred have any position", and of whom the villagers in particular were "helpless in the affairs of life" (Boyce 1969)."

Beside efforts to abolish *jizya*, Manekji inspired repairing and erection of Zoroastrian buildings in Yazd, Kerman and Tehran and establishing of schools for mainly illiterate Zoroastrians. As Boyce claims, the time after the abolition of *jizya* was "in many ways a golden age for the Irani Zoroastrians" (2001: 211). The changes brought progress in the field of education and improvement of their economic situation. Since the events the situation of Zoroastrian community in Iran has been developing, but the turning point in the modern history of Zoroastrians in Iran was the Constitutional Revolution of 1906–09 that led to the establishment of the first Iranian Parliament.

The constitutional movement tended to stop discrimination and to guarantee equal treatment for all citizens. In the new constitution drafted in 1906/1907 Islam was the official religion of the country but recognized religious minorities gained civil rights equivalent to the rights of Muslims and were given representatives in Parliament[2]. The autonomy over their international affairs was increased (Kestenberg Amighi 1990: 160–161). They gained greater economic freedom and new opportunities for growth. At that time the modern Zoroastrian community concentrated mostly in the capital city begun to establish. As Kestenberg Amighi remarks, "the revolution thus created the atmosphere for substantial change in the Zoroastrian community; it disrupted Zoroastrians old community institutions and opened the way for development in new directions" (1990: 164).

Another key event in the modern history of the Zoroastrian community in Iran was the Islamic Revolution that has completely changed the sociopolitical situation of religious minorities. The revolution overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979) and transformed a constitutional monarchy into an Islamic republic where religion is used as a political ideology. The new character of the state created "a new set of relationships between the state and the religious minorities, constituting compartmentalization and segmentation" (Sanasarian 2006: 73). Although in theory the recognized minorities kept the similar status as before 1979, in reality their situation become more complex. The sharp distinction between *us*-Muslims and *them*-non-Muslims, based on the state ideology, has developed (Sanasarian 2006: 73).

According to the Iranian constitution proclaimed after the Islamic Revolution, Twelver Shi'ism is the official religion of the state but the four schools of law of Sunnite Islam and Zaydi Shi'ism are also recognized. The new constitution was "not a republican constitution made consistent with Shi'ism but a constitution purporting to be fundamentally

1) Manekji (1813–1890), born near Surat, was a son of Limji Hushang Hataria of Hindustan. He reached the Persian Gulf in April 1854 (Boyce 1969).

2) The first Zoroastrian representative in Parliament was Jamshid Jamshidiyān (1851–1932), a merchant and a prominent figure in the community.

Islamic and to incorporate specifically Shi'ite priciples of government" (Arjomand 1992). According to Article 13 of the constitution, "Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs[3] and religious education" (*Iran – Constitution* 1994)[4].

The above mentioned status of recognized religious minorities is based on the Islamic category of protected people (*dhimmi*). However, it does not reveal these communities from marginalization or even discrimination in the country where confession is one of the most important determinant of social status. Islam is closely related to every sphere of the public life which is saturated with religious elements. It causes that the reality is much more complicated for the citizens who confess other religions. The marginalization of non-Muslim communities in Iran after 1979 and the stress put on the religion in public life has caused that religion plays more important role than before the revolution also for religious minorities.

Collective Identity Theory

The conceptual model used in this article is based on the collective identity theory developed by Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt and Bernhard Giesen (1991). For the purpose of my analysis I state that collective identity is not naturally generated but socially constructed. More precisely speaking, it is produced by the social construction of boundaries which divide and separate *us* from other groups. The process of constructing boundaries is based on symbolic codes of distinction that led us to recognition of differences in the chaos of the outside world:

> "Codes can be compared to maps that provide the actor on a journey with instructions about what to expect. Much as maps could never reproduce the diversity of an actual landscape, but always abstract landscape after a particular fashion, so too do codes always offer only an arbitrary simplification of *situation.* And much like maps, codes can be more or less precise, can correlate more or less accurately to reality. But just as we cannot make a purposeful motion without having an elementary map in mind, social reality cannot be perceived without codes. Codes of social classification are the core element in the construction of communality and otherness, of collective identity and differentiation. No boundary would have substance without codes (Giesen 1998: 13)."

3) The Zoroastrian code of personal affairs regulates following matters: marriage proposal (khāstegāri); engagement (nāmzadi); marriage (zanāshu'i) and matters concerning it; divorce (talāq); children guardianship (negahdāri-ye farzandān) and other matters concerning offspring; will (vasiyat) (Qavānin-o-moqarrarāt-e omumi 2007).

4) Article 13 recognizes Iranian Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians as "the only religious minorities", thus excludes Baha'is from social life.

Constructing the collective identity through codes takes place mostly in socializing and communicative situations: "in different rituals and ceremonies, and through various agencies of socialization and educational institutions, 'mass media,' religious preachings and the like" (Eisenstadt 2009: 140). In these situations members of a group are introduced into the collectivity and collective rituals portraying its distinctive identity and cultural program of the collectivity. They are attached to its symbols and boundaries. The spread of the ideas is closely related to patterns of cultural creativity such as art, philosophy, literature, architecture and 'popular culture' in the great variety of manifestations. The process of collective identity construction is influenced by various social actors, especially by elites and social leaders in interaction with the rest of a group. The core of this interaction is the activation of predispositions or propensities by different 'influentials' attempting to attain hegemony in various settings. When their ideas of boundaries and symbols find are acknowledged by wider sectors of the community, the collective identities may crystallize (Eisenstadt 2009: 140–142).

Eisenstadt and Giesen recognize three major codes of the construction of collective identity. They are seen as ideal types because in reality the coding usually involves elements of different codes. These are codes of primordiality, civility and sacredness (or culture). The primordial code promotes distinction based at the "nature" and uses original categories perceived as objective and unchangeable as gender, kinship, ethnicity, race. In the civic code the collectivity is based on familiarity of social routines, traditions and rules of participation in everyday life. According to the sacred code, the identity is based on the particular relation of its subject to the sacred that may be understood as God, Reason, Rationality (1991: 76–82). Referring to the above mentioned theory I would like to present a few ideas used in constructing Iranian Zoroastrian collective identity by the group leaders.

Constructing Zoroastrian Collective Identity

In contemporary Iran Zoroastrians reside mostly in urbanized areas of Tehran, Yazd and Kerman provinces. Today, the majority of Zoroastrians live in Tehran where their community developed during the last century. In the 1850's there were about 50 Zoroastrian merchants in the capital of Iran and by the turn of twentieth century the community consisted of less than 330 members, first of all gardeners working on the land of the Shah and merchants. According to the population census of 1912, 500 Zoroastrians were found in the city at that time and in the course of time more and more Zoroastrians were migrating to Tehran seeking economic and other opportunities offered by the capital city (Kestenberg Amighi 1990: 143–148). After the Constitutional Revolution the Zoroastrian community in Tehran developed and new institutions appeared. Among them were Tehran Zoroastrian Council (*Anjoman-e Zartoshtiyān-e Tehrān*) established in 1907, Tehran Mobeds Council (*Anjoman-e Mobedān-e Tehrān* or *Konkāsh-e Mobedān-e Tehrān*) established in 1951, Zoroastrian Women's Council (*Sāzmān-e Zanān-e Zartoshti*) established in 1950 and others (Mazdāpur 1995: 94–97). Also in the field of education a major step forward has been made:

> "In this period, Zoroastrian community institutions grew rapidly, stimulated by new interests and needs of the population and the availability of financial resources (...). In 1933 a Parsi philantrophist, Bahramji Bivakji, gave funds for a boys' school, Firuz Bahram. A girls' high school, Anushirvan Dagar, was built shortly afterwards in 1936 with funds collected by the Parsi representative, Ardeshirji. These schools were of the highest quality in Iran. The girls' grammar school, Iraj, was the first Iranian school to have French and English classes and to include sports in its curriculum. The best teachers were recruited from foreign schools and the use of male teachers in girls' schools was accepted in order to acquire the most qualified staff (Kestenberg Amighi 1990: 17–175)."

In 1956 there were almost 5,000 of Zoroastrian residents in Tehran and their number grew to approximately 12,500 by 1974. There were different organizations, clubs, schools and other institutions as clinic, library and publishing houses in the capital city before the Islamic Revolution (Kestenberg Amighi 1990: 213). During the Pahlavi regime as other religious minorities Zoroastrians suffered from discrimination, especially at the provincial level, and their institutions were subject to restrictions. On the other hand, they became an important symbol of ancient Persia and an instrument of Reza Shah's nationalist ideology. Their relations with the government were especially good during the regime of his son Mohammad Reza Shah (Sanasarian 2006: 49)[5].

After the Islamic Revolution the number of Zoroastrians in Tehran in 1980's was estimated at about 15,000 (Sanasarian 2006: 50). Today, their population in the whole country equals 22,500-23,000 (Niknām 2007: 35)[6]. As I mentioned before, after the triumph of the Islamic Revolution sharper distinction between *us*-Muslims and *them*-non-Muslims developed in social life of Iran. This process has influenced the existence of marginalized religious minorities, their ways of life and their perception of own cultural heritage. The intellectual leaders of such groups as religious authorities, teachers or journalists make efforts to preserve their religion and tradition. Through ceremonies and rituals, different agencies of socialization and education, through art, religious preaching, newspapers and publications, the collective identity is being constructed and members of the community are attached to its symbols and boundaries. However, in the sociopolitical context of Islamic country it is difficult to compromise between restrictions and protection of non-Muslim culture. Promotion of the minority religions outside the community is forbidden and there is no way to make converts. Many aspects of religious life are subject to control of government institutions. Everything what is said, written or put on the website may be checked by the Islamic authorities.

The leaders of the Zoroastrian community are both priests, *mobeds*, and secular intellectuals, some of them connected with Zoroastrian public institutions. The most popular official institutions involved in process of spreading and institutionalization of the idea of Zoroastrian identity based on commonly shared symbols are *anjomans*, councils located in the places inhabited by Zoroastrians. The media the community leaders use for spreading their ideas of collective identity are restricted by the boundaries of Iranian law. As Iranian constitution states, "publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public" (Article 24, *Iran – Constitution* 1994). Also freedom of expression in radio and television is restricted and what they broadcast must be compatible with "the Islamic' criteria and the best interests of the country" (Article 175, *Iran – Constitution* 1994). The regulation also concerns the Internet which is under one of the most restrictive censorships in the world[7].

Sharing the status of a religious minority recognized by the constitution (*aqalliyat-e dini*), Zoroastrians use religious elements and values in constructing their collective identity. As I mentioned before, it seems that under the religious pressure that appeared in Iran after the Islamic Revolution distinct religion of non-Muslims plays more important role in their social life than before 1979. Also during my field research in 2008 I noticed that contemporary Zoroastrians perceived themselves as more interested in their own religion as they used to be before the revolution.

It may be interpreted in terms of Castell's *identity for resistance* which is an instrument used by minority group to build its identity in the context of social marginalization:

> "It constructs forms of collective resistance against otherwise unbearable oppression, usually on the basis of identities that were, apparently, clearly defined by history, geography, or biology, making it easier to essentialize the boundaries of resistance. For instance, ethnically based nationalism, as Scheff proposes, often "arises out of a sense of alienation, on the one hand, and resentment against unfair exclusion, whether political, economic or social." Religious fundamentalism, territorial communities, nationalist self affirmation, or even the pride of self-denigration, inverting the terms of oppressive discourse (...), are all expressions of what I name *the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded.* That is, the building of defensive identity in the terms of dominant institutions/ideologies, reversing the value judgment while reinforcing the boundary (Castells 2004: 9)."

5) On the Tehran Zoroastrian community during the Pahlavi era see for example Kestenberg Amighi (1990).

6) It is worth to mention that the number of Zoroastrians worldwide in 1990's was estimated at about 150,000 but the community is not homogeneous and distinctive cultural patterns characterize Iranian Zoroastrians and Parsis living in separate geo-cultural areas for ages (Writer 1994).

7) Considering violators of freedom of expression in the virtual space Iran has a leading place on the list of the "Enemies of the Internet 2010" drawn up by Reporters Without Borders (Morillon 2010).

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The efforts to underline Zoroastrian religious distinctiveness may be characterized in terms of the code of sacredness. Among the elements used in the process of identity construction are three Zoroastrian essentials: *good thoughts*, *good words* and *good deeds* (*pendār-e nik*, *goftār-e nik*, *kerdār-e nik)* that should be observed by worshippers. It is a universal principle not controversial in the eyes of Islam. The most common iconographic representations are pictures of the prophet Zoroaster and the symbol of *fravahar*. Next to the emblems indispensable in Iranian public institutions as pictures of the Supreme Leaders, Ruhollāh Khomeini and Ali Khāmenei, Zoroastrians put pictures of their prophet. It can be found in schools for the minority, temples, clubs, organizations. Also the *fravahar,* which is widely recognized iconographic symbol of Zoroastrianism, is a very common emblem marking Zoroastrian public sphere. It is also drawn on many elements of everyday life as calendars, textbooks, signboards.

As religious references are obvious for the community officially recognized by dominant group as a religious minority, much more interesting seems to be constructing collective Zoroastrian identity through the code of civility. The ideas are inspired by ancient Persian history and mythology. It is the part of Zoroastrian symbolical culture common both for Iranian Zoroastrians and Iranian Muslims. The idea stresses their joint heir and the origin of being Iranian regardless of religion.

After the Islamic Revolution the unique link of Zoroastrians to Iranian culture was officially stressed by one of the community leaders, priest Rostam Shahzādi, deputy representing the minority in the Assembly of Experts (*Majles-e Khobregān*) deliberating on a project of new Iranian constitution. In his first speech during the discussion over the article of the document considering the status of religious minorities he explained that many Zoroastrians would not like to be considered as minority because of their particular connection with Iranian land and people. He emphasized that Zoroastrians and Iranian Muslims are the same people sharing the same traditions, although after conversion of most Iranians to Islam the name of their God and the prophet had changed (Sanasarian 2006: 67).

Zoroastrians perceive themselves as inheritors of Iranian tradition. As Mazdāpur writes, "at present the little Zoroastrian community is a relic of ancestors' old rites of this land" (1995: 115). Instead of emphasizing differences between Iranians of distinct religions, Zoroastrian leaders try to put stress on unity of all Iranians. They stress strengthening of cultural ties between Iranian citizens instead of promotion of religious believes:

> "This is a praiseworthy way, good intention and philanthropy inherited from our honorable ancestors Darius, Cambyses and Ardashir[8]. We are confident that if all Iranians also follow this way and respect and consider important their own splendid historical past, as in ancient times Iran will become again the center of science and knowledge and the source of craft and culture (Shahzādi 2001: 202)[9]."

According to this idea, Iranian culture can be maintained through union of all Iranians as it happened in the history, for example during the invasions of Alexander the Great, Arabs or Mongols. The basis is common past and heritage. The main value emphasized is Iranian nationalism and national identity that have been keeping the nation together during the history:

> "Maybe today, from the place we have come across we need to look again into the past. The past when different tribes and states tried hard to destroy religion and culture of Iran. (...) Praise those who (...) still swagger preserving these rites, language and alphabet; protect and enrich this culture (Shahryāri 2008)."

The civil (or traditional) code of collective identity construction is based at stressing the common tradition and historical continuity:

> "the celebration of traditions and commemoration or past events becomes the core issue for rituals. At special places and on special dates, the tradition of the community is constructed and reconstructed by elaborated rituals, by public celebrations as well as by private parties. Commemorative rituals represent the past of the Community, founding myths recall the beginning of its history, special commensural rituals unite the members, and special classicist forms show its continuity on the level of aesthetics (Giesen 1998: 31)."

The identity concept popularized by many Zoroastrian leaders is build on symbols of Iranian history. Great figures of Iranian past as kings of the Achaemenid dynasty (550–330) as Cyrus the Great, Darius the Great or Ardashir I, the founder of the Sassanid dynasty (224–651), are recalled. One of the most popular symbolic places is Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid empire located in the Fars province. Also much attention is paid to Ferdowsi[10] and his opus magnum *The Epic of Kings* (*Shāhnāme*). It is very popular and influential Persian national epic reviving and regenerating the Persian language and cultural traditions, gathering ancient Persian myths and legends. The *Shāhnāme*'s heroes decorate Zoroastrian calendars and postcards. Zoroastrian institutions as Jamshid Cultural Foundation (*Bonyād-e Farhangi-ye Jamshid*) in Tehran organize free lessons of *Shāhnāme-khāni,* reading of Ferdowsi's epic. Ferdowsi's birthday is also celebrated. The old Iranian ceremonies as sea-

8) Famous Persian kings of the Achaemenid and the Sassanid empires.

9) Although this speech by mobed Shahzādi was originally written in 1942, it is still printed and read in Iran.

10) Abu'l-Qāsem Ferdowsi (940–1019 or 1025) – one of the greatest Persian epic poets.

sonal festivals of Nowruz, Mehrgān, Tiregān and Sade are popularized. Zoroastrian magazines pay much attention to Persian history, literature and language common for all Iranians.

Also interest is put in Persian language freed from Arabic elements. For example some of journalists of Zoroastrian cultural biweekly magazine "Amordād" in their articles try to use as many originally Persian words as possible. The magazine also regularly publishes Persian equivalents of words of Arabic origin encouraging readers to use them, for example *nām* instead of *esm* (*name*), *andak andak* in place *tadrijan* (*gradually*).

This above described ideas have a long history in Iranian culture. The perception of Iranian nation (*ariya*) as one entity united by religious, cultural and ethnic elements goes back as far as the times of Achaemenid reign. As a political idea it has been documented as a feature of Sassanian propaganda in the third century. The idea of Iranian kingdom or empire (*Irānshahr*) that marked later Iranian history has developed (Gnoli 2004: 504–505):

> "In Iran the claim to Achaemenid origins, the identification of the Sasanian dynasty with the dynasty of the Kayanians[11], the setting up of a traditional heritage that met the requirements of the new dynasty and the social forces that were its mainstay are just so many aspects of a single political and cultural process that was vigorously upheld by the Sasanian propaganda. (...) In Sasanian Iran there began to take shape a national culture, fully aware of being "Iranian", that was motivated by the restoration and the revival of the wisdom of the "sages of old," *dānāgān pēšēnīgān*, as well as by the glorification of a great heroic past, and was imbued with an omnipresent antiquarian taste and an archaizing spirit. This process developed steadily in the course of time and took on a definite shape especially in the 6th century, but its roots were nonetheless in the 3rd century, in the transition of power from the Arsacids (q.v.) to the Sasanians and in the Zoroastrian church's gaining of political recognition (Gnoli 2004: 505–506)."

As opposed to countries such as Syria and Egypt that lost their languages as a result of Arabic hegemony, Iran maintained its linguistic and cultural distinctiveness. Revival of Persian culture in the frames of Islamic reality began in the early Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258) and has been developing in the course of time giving the foundation of modern Iranian identity. The stress was put on territorial ties and connections of people to the kingdom of Iran (*irānshahr*, *irānzamin*, *molk-e Irān*, *mamlekat-e Irān*, *keshvar-e Irān*). The idea was rooted in mythological and traditional history and supported for example by such activities as Nowruz festival, *naqqāli* – professional storytelling and *Shāhnāme-khāni (*Ashraf 2004a).

In the nineteenth century the modern age of nation-building and nationalism in Iran has begun. It was rooted in the above mentioned historical awareness and cultural consciousness. Creation of new Iranian national identity was based on territorial ties, historical memories and commemoration of past events. At first the new ideas of nation and nationalism appeared sporadically but flourished in the course of Constitutional Revolution and later "were transformed into a state-sponsored form of ethno-nationalism during the Pahlavi period (1925–78)" (Ashraf 2004b: 523):

> "Celebration and commemoration of the collective historical memory through symbols and myths, rituals and ceremonies, museums and archeological sites, Achaemenid architectural design for public edifices, nationalistic music, and a national dress code became its hallmarks. In this period, the emerging nationalist historical writings shifted from the emphasis on the continuity with "the traditional history" to the continuity with "factual history" by emphasizing the Achaemenid period as the political origin of the state (Ashraf 2004b: 526)."

The main stress was put on such ideas as the continuity of 25 centuries of history of Persian empire and Iranian nation formed during the Achaemenid period. In the ideological framework of the Pahlavi state the idea of Achaemenid Iran as a geo-political concept, as "the empire of the Aryans", was adopted:

> "These ideas laid the foundation of what Alessandro Bausani (...) calls "Aryan and Neo-Achaemenid nationalism." They led to four historical innovations: the change, in Western languages, of the country's name from Persia to Iran in 1935, signifying the primordial Aryan origin of the nation; the assumption of the title Āryā-mehr (the Sun of the Aryans) by Moḥammad Reżā Shah in 1965; celebration of the 2,500 years of Persian empire in 1971; and finally, the change of the national calendar from the Islamic Hejri to the invented Šāhanšāhi – the time of the formation of the Persian empire by Cyrus the Great (...). The historical agenda included an emphasis on the Achaemenid era (as discussed above) and the encouragement of archeological excavations by American and European archeologists. The foundation of an archeological museum in Tehran (Muza-ye Irān-e bāstān), construction of public edifices with Achaemenid motifs (...), and the foundation of the National Monuments Council of Iran (...) were part of these efforts (Ashraf 2006b: 527)."

Beside the ancient history, Persian language was also the main element of the Pahlavi ideology of building homogeneous Iranian national identity and of the new state nationalism. The language policy tending to purge Persian from Arabic appeared in nineteenth century postulated by a group of nationalist intellectuals. In the course of time the idea emerged and in 1935 the Iranian Academy of Language (*Farhangestān-e Zabān-e Irān*) aiming at replacing Arabic words with their Persian equivalents was established (Ashraf 2006b: 527).

11) The Kayanid dynasty – a semi-mythological, ancient Iranian dynasty.

Summarizing this short analysis I have to repeat that reality in the Islamic Republic of Iran brought new challenges for non-Muslim citizens. They had to find the place in the social structure of restrictive theocratic country where the religion of majority is privileged and the law of the state is compatible with some laws of Sharia. Other religions are accepted and keep official status of recognized religious minorities or are entirely excluded from social life.

It has influenced the process of constructing the collective identity of the religious minority groups as Zoroastrians. The construction of contemporary Zoroastrian collective identity is complex and based on elements of both the sacred and the traditional code of distinction characterized by Giesen and Eisenstadt. Zoroastrian intellectuals and authorities try to build the idea of collective identity within the boundaries of Islamic law. On one hand they emphasis the distinctiveness community recalling religious symbols and beliefs. On the other hand they try to overcome the marginal status and to stress the ties they have with Iranian culture and to show they are rightful members of Iranian nation.

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